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To: Members of the Human Services Appropriations Committee  
From: Alison Cunningham, Executive Director

Earlier this week, I attended an afternoon workshop in Boston led by the Interagency Council on Ending Homelessness. The event was to find out from those of us working in this field what is needed to achieve this lofty goal. The information will make its way back to D.C. where advocates will write a plan to end homelessness to present to the administration by the end of May.

So what did we come up with? Jobs and housing, access to services and in some cases to benefits, and an educational system that prepares people to join the workforce. We know what it will take to solve the problem of homelessness. And the solutions will require the public will to achieve the goal of ending this crisis.

What does this have to do with this hearing? Everything. For the past eight years or so, advocates around this state have embraced that same goal of ending homelessness. There are cities all over the state that have ambitious plans and great community support toward achieving that goal. We have accomplished so much with the advent of permanent supportive housing and our shared belief that people who are chronically homeless can be housed and reintegrate into our communities in a meaningful way.

Yet, here we are tonight, at a table that many of us have been at in the past, asking yet again that our meager DSS budgets be saved from cuts enacted through the Governor's budget. We're asking yet again that the state provide more RAP certificates. We're asking yet again for a small increase in the number of permanent supportive housing vouchers with services attached.

What we are asking for will ultimately save the state money. As we move people out of shelters into housing, the use of costly emergency services, including hospitals and jails, will decrease. More importantly, the quality of life for those people who are homeless will soar.

We'll never see the end of homelessness if the state does not provide funding for the solutions that do work. The solutions today still do include emergency shelters which need to be fully funded if we are to keep up with the increased demand on our services. Shelters are at capacity not seen before, with an alarming 107% occupancy rate across the state.

You are up against incredible pressure to create a balanced budget in a disastrous economy. It may be time to take a hard look at revenues and consider increases that might seem dreadful to some. But the state simply cannot turn its back on the poor who need your support now more than ever.